

Timothy Brown House

HABS No. NY-5602

(known as Brown's Temple or the Spirit House)

South Main Street, on Route 26, 600 feet south of the intersection
of Routes 80 and 26

Georgetown

Madison County

New York

HABS
NY,
27-GEO,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

TIMOTHY BROWN HOUSE

(known as BROWN'S TEMPLE or the SPIRIT HOUSE)

Location: South Main Street, on Route 26, 600 feet south of the intersection of Routes 80 and 26, Georgetown, Madison County, New York

Present Owner: Mrs. Alice Stevens Cossitt

Present Occupant: Mr. and Mrs. (Alice) Leemon R. Cossitt

Present Use: Residence

Brief Statement of Significance: Unique "folk" architecture and center for Spiritualist group from 1864 to 1885.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 1864, Nov. 21 | - Samuel Clark and Eilania, his wife, sell to Timothy Brown three-quarters of an acre (Madison County Deeds, Ledger 102, p. 434). |
| 1872, April 15 | - Brown buys an additional 12 acres from Elnosthro Ellis (Madison County Deeds, Ledger 126, p. 70) upon which he put the back of his building and out buildings. |
| 1885, May 5 | - Property transferred to Sarah Brown, wife of Timothy (Madison County Deeds, Ledger 163, p. 155). |
| 1898 | - Property sold by Mrs. Brown's great-nephew, Floyd Currier and wife, who had received it from Sarah Brown, to Chauncey Stevens (Madison County Deeds, Ledger 199, p. 490). Mrs. Brown entered the Old Ladies' Home in Oneida, August 3, 1899 and died there July 6, 1908. |
| 1902 | - Stevens died and property in estate. |
| 1920 | - Property recorded in Alice Stevens' name, now Mrs. Leemon R. Cossitt. |

NY
27-6601
1-

TIMOTHY BROWN HOUSE
(known as BROWN'S TEMPLE or the SPIRIT HOUSE)
HABS No. NY-5602 (Page 2)

2. Date of erection: After 1864 and before 1868, when tickets were sold for a Thanksgiving dance at the house.
 3. Architect: Unknown.
 4. Original plans, construction, etc.: The exterior of the house is little altered and still has rounded corners created by a series of scalloped 2" x 4" vertical planks arranged in a semi-circle, similarly constructed pilaster-like forms between each bay, and a mammoth cornice of overhanging fascias decorated by symmetrical brackets. Interior spaces once used for meeting halls and darkrooms for spirits have been converted into use as a house.
 5. Builder, suppliers, etc.: Lumber probably came from Brown's surrounding woodlots.
 6. Alterations and additions:
 - 1874 - rear portion of house removed and the former Presbyterian Church building added to the rear.
 - 1906 - Church addition torn down and present addition built, porches added, and second floor divided into bedrooms.
 - 1938-40 - second floor ceilings lowered; new roof installed over old one.
 - 1946 - bathroom, sun parlor, and sun porch on south side added and the upstairs "den" enlarged.
- B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:
Timothy Brown was born in Vermont in 1815 and moved from the town of Newburn, in Orange County, Vermont, to Georgetown, N.Y. in 1847 with his wife, Sarah, and their children. Apparently he was trained as a carpenter by the "spirits", which he kept in dark closets, assisted him in all his work. The present "Spirit House" was the second house he built in Georgetown. The Browns lived in part of the house and used the rest for meetings and allowed theatrical and touring groups to entertain there. Brown died in 1885 and his widow in 1906.
- C. Sources of Information:
1. Old Views: Clippings in scrapbook owned by Mrs. Cossitt.
 2. Bibliography:
 - Alvord, Reed. "Designed by Spirits", The Ford Times. Dearborn, Mich.: Ford Motor Company, 1957. pp. 57-58.
 - Child, Hamilton. Gazeteer and Business Directory of Madison County, New York. Syracuse, N.Y.: Journal Office, 1868. p. 147.

- Courtright, John. Georgetown Illustrated. South Otselic:
R. M. Reynolds and Son, 1906. Section marked "Churches."
- Cross, Whitney R. Burned-Over District. Ithaca, New York:
Cornell University Press, 1950. p. 1 and section
on spiritualism.
- Current, Richard N., T. Harry Williams, and Frank Friedel.
American History Survey. New York: Alfred A.
Knopf, 1963. p. 39.
- Ellis, David M., James A. Frost, Harold C. Syrett, and
Harry F. Carman. Short History of New York State.
Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1957.
pp. 307-308.
- Smith, James Hadden. History of Chenango and Madison
Counties. Syracuse, N.Y.: D. Mason and Company
1880. pp. 591-592.
- Smith, John E. History of Madison County. Boston History
Company, 1899. p. 354.
- Whitney, Mrs. L. M. Hammond. History of Madison County,
State of New York. Syracuse, N.Y.: Truair, Smith
& Co., 1872. p. 404.

Prepared by Milton Chapin
Georgetown, N.Y.
January, 1965.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Unique decorative work on the interior and exterior of the house built as a center for spiritualism.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Dimensions: Two stories, original three bay front 34'8", plus 11' addition, by 33'6", plus 16'2" addition.
2. Foundations: Dry stone wall, half plastered.
3. Wall construction: Painted (white) planking on north and west elevations, white clapboards on south and east elevations.

4. Structural system, framing: Mostly 10" x 14" beams and timbers, 9" x 14" posts. Dimensions of sills unknown but undoubtedly very large; mortise and tenon joints and square nails.
5. Porches, etc: Two entrance porches, west and north sides; back porch at rear of addition; stoop at east end of enclosed porch. Entrance porches each have two scalloped columns and jigsaw brackets in same design as on cornice.
6. Chimneys: Three at present; original ones no longer remain; brick construction.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: All doorways simple single plank casing.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Mostly four-over-four original windows. Storm windows one-over-one are on first floor only. Exterior green wooden louvred shutters are original.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Prior to 1938, the roof peaked at the center and was covered with metal roofing. After 1938 a new asphalt roof, that also peaked at the center, was put on over the original roof.
 - b. Cornice: See photos. Extremely deep cornice on original house with three scalloped bands around the top on all sides; a greatly expanded architrave with jigsaw brackets hanging from the under edge of the three fascias on the north, west and south sides; average of seven brackets in each row.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: Present entrance on north into dining room (door originally a window); 14'9" x 14'11"; entrance to present stairs opposite door on south wall; entrance to kitchen (formerly darkroom for spirits) on south wall; entrance to living room on west wall. Present living room 15'6" x 17'5"; doorway from dining room, window frames, and west exterior door all have scalloped frames; living

TIMOTHY BROWN HOUSE

(known as BROWN'S TEMPLE or the SPIRIT HOUSE)

HABS No. NY-5602 (Page 5)

NY,
27-020,
1-

room and bedroom to south originally one room.

Present bedroom in southwest corner, 15'6" x 12'11"; door into bathroom addition originally a window, door into kitchen originally into hall. Present kitchen, 15'5" x 15'5"; beyond kitchen to east is storage area (rear of original hall) and staircase (occupying space of second former darkroom for spirits). Addition to south of bathroom (at west end), 7'8" x 10'3"; sun parlor, 15' x 10'3", and enclosed porch (at east end), 15'9" x 10'6". Addition to east of original house, utility room (adjacent to enclosed porch) 15'7" x 9'4"; pantry (north west side) 3'6" x 10'; and, woodshed (northeast side) 12' x 10'.

- b. Second floor: Present second floor (originally one large hall combined with church added by Brown at rear): staircase and stairhall run north-south at rear of original house on south side; hall to bedrooms runs east-west in center of house, termination at closet (8'11" x 3'6") on west wall. Three bedrooms along north wall; northeast room 8'11" x 14'5"; north room 12' x 14'5"; northwest room 8'11" x 17'11". Den in southwest corner 17'2" x 8'7"; bathroom (4'2" x 9'6") adjacent between den and stairhall. In addition at east end, one unfinished room 15' x 19'7".
 - c. Attic: Outside entrance through the cornice at rear of house; new roof about 15' high in center over original roof; evidence of fire c. 1922; originally a drain from center to cellar.
 - d. Cellar: Inside entrance; contains storage shelves, furnace, floor cemented c. 1940 and reinforcing steel beams placed in center of ceiling to support first floor.
2. Stairways: Stairway constructed c. 1908 along interior east wall of original house in space of former spirit darkroom.
 3. Flooring: Original was maple planks, modern floor is oak.
 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Originally walls plastered and ceiling lathed; wainscoting on first floor is from church pew doors. Present finish is knotty pine paneling or plastered and wallpapered.

NY
27-620,
1-

TIMOTHY BROWN HOUSE
(known as BROWN'S TEMPLE or the SPIRIT HOUSE)
HABS No. NY-5602 (Page 6)

5. Doorways and doors: Three original doors remain with scallop trim; door to sun porch from utility room may have been from church.
6. Decorative features and trim: On original first floor doorways and windows are scalloped (1" x 2"); wainscoting in first floor dining room of three half round moldings.
7. Lighting: All electric lighting, most installed in 1930's.
8. Heating: Central oil furnace; one fireplace in sun parlor. According to the present owner, the house was formerly heated by stoves, except for second floor hall which was heated with a 15' x 5' iron heater. It sat up on bricks and was attached at one end to the chimney and at the other end could be opened for the insertion of long planks for fuel.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. Orientation: House faces west (Route 26), but present entrance off driveway on north side.
2. Outbuildings: One shop and one garage located northeast of the house.
3. Landscaping: House surrounded by spruce, maples, and cedars. A picket fence runs north and south and east and west on west side and north side of the property. There is a driveway to the garage from Routes 26 and 80 on the north side of house.

Prepared by Milton Chapin
December, 1964

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were part of the documentation of structures in the Southern Tier of New York State undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Cortland County Historical Society and the Valley Development Foundation, Inc.

The project was under the general supervision of John Poppeliers, Chief, Historic American Buildings Survey. Architectural information was prepared in December, 1964, by Milton Chapin, at that time a student at Cortland State College, University of the State of New York. Historical information was prepared by Mr. Chapin in January, 1965. Photographs are by Jack E. Boucher and were taken in April, 1966. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Constance Werner Ramirez, March, 1974.